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Unveiling the online assessment journey: a deep dive into learners' experiences

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ABSTRACT

The surge of online assessment methods, driven by technological advancements and evolving student needs, has significantly reshaped the educational landscape. This study explores the intricacies of online assessment from the learners' perspective. Utilizing a qualitative approach, the research digs into the varied experiences of learners navigating this innovative assessment terrain. Through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, the study unpacks learners' challenges, opportunities, and nuanced perspectives, ranging from technological proficiency and adaptability to the design of assessments and feedback mechanisms. Additionally, the research investigates the socio-emotional impact of online assessment, examining issues of equity, engagement, and motivation within virtual learning environments. Findings reveal that while online assessments offer flexibility and convenience, they also present significant challenges. Participants reported difficulties with internet connectivity, technical glitches, and a lack of robust authentication measures, which can facilitate cheating. In conclusion, the study underscores concerns about equity, as students with limited access to technology or stable internet connections may be disadvantaged. To optimize online assessment practices, educators, policymakers, and instructional designers must prioritize accessibility, security, and the development of authentic and engaging assessments that foster student learning and well-being.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, education has undergone a profound shift towards digitalization, driven by the pervasive influence of technology and the urgency to adapt to changing learning paradigms. Central to this transformation is the integration of online assessment methods, which offer unprecedented opportunities for flexibility, accessibility, and innovation in evaluating student learning outcomes. As educational institutions embrace the potential of online assessment to enhance pedagogical practices and meet the diverse needs of learners, a critical need arises to understand the intricate landscape of learners' experiences within this evolving context. This study seeks to shed light on the multifaceted dimensions of online assessment from the learners' perspective. With the proliferation of digital learning platforms and the increasing prevalence of remote and hybrid learning environments, learners are navigating new terrain characterized by virtual

classrooms, asynchronous interactions, and algorithmic evaluation systems. In this dynamic landscape, exploring how learners perceive, engage with, and are impacted by online assessment practices is imperative. At the heart of this inquiry lies a recognition of the diverse array of learners traversing the online assessment journey, each with their unique backgrounds, preferences, and challenges. From digital natives adept at navigating complex technological interfaces to adult learners grappling with digital literacy barriers, learners' experiences encompass a rich tapestry of perspectives, aspirations, and constraints. By delving into these experiences, this research explores the underlying factors shaping learners' interactions with online assessment tools and processes.

Moreover, this study seeks to go beyond surface-level examinations of online assessment practices to unravel the socio-emotional dimensions underpinning learners' engagement and motivation in virtual learning environments. As learners grapple with equity, inclusivity, and belongingness issues in the digital realm, exploring how online assessment practices intersect with broader socio-cultural factors to shape learners' experiences and outcomes becomes imperative. Through a qualitative research approach, this study aims to capture the nuances, complexities, and lived realities of learners' experiences with online assessment. The research also aims to comprehensively understand the opportunities, challenges, and implications inherent in implementing online assessment methods by employing in-depth interviews, thematic analysis, and participant narratives. Ultimately, this research seeks to inform educational stakeholders, policymakers, and practitioners about the critical considerations and best practices necessary to optimize the effectiveness and inclusivity of online assessment strategies in contemporary learning contexts.

While research exists on online assessments and their effectiveness in measuring learning outcomes [1], [2], there needs to be more understanding of the learner's experience throughout the online assessment journey. Most studies focus on designing and developing online assessments or analyzing their psychometric properties [3]. This gap leaves a blind spot regarding the learners' perspectives on various aspects of online assessments, including learner engagement and motivation, accessibility and inclusivity, stress and anxiety, and feedback and learning improvement. Existing research primarily focused on how online assessments influence academic performance and completion rates. However, there needs to be more detailed exploration into how these assessments impact learner engagement and motivation over time. Understanding learners' psychological and emotional experiences during online assessments could provide insights into how to design more effective and engaging assessment tools. In addition, most studies address general usability and technical challenges associated with online assessments. However, there is insufficient focus on the accessibility issues faced by diverse learner populations, including those with disabilities. There is a need to investigate how different learner groups experience online assessments and what barriers they encounter, which could inform the development of more inclusive assessment practices.

On the other hand, the role of stress and anxiety in online assessment contexts is another area that has not been adequately explored. While traditional exams have been studied in this regard, the unique stressors associated with online assessments, such as technical glitches, unfamiliarity with the format, and isolation, require further investigation to understand their impact on learner performance and well-being. Furthermore, existing research often highlights the importance of timely feedback in online assessments. However, there needs to be more understanding of how learners perceive and utilize this feedback to improve their learning. More in-depth studies are needed to explore how learners receive, interpret, and act upon feedback and how it influences their subsequent learning strategies and outcomes.

Addressing the gaps above may provide a more holistic understanding of learners' experiences with online assessments. By focusing on engagement, accessibility, stress, and feedback, the present study can significantly contribute to developing more effective, inclusive, and learner-centred online assessment practices. This deeper insight is crucial for educators, policymakers, and technologists aiming to enhance the quality and equity of online education.

2. METHOD

Given the qualitative nature of the study, the researchers employed a mixed-methods approach that yielded the most comprehensive and insightful results. The researchers adopted a mix of quantitative and qualitative sequential research designs. This research method used a sequential design with 2 phases: first, an online survey was conducted to gather quantitative data, followed by one-on-one interviews to collect qualitative data. The qualitative phase was based on the findings from the quantitative phase. The qualitative method allowed for an in-depth exploration of learners' experiences with online assessment. It incorporated phenomenology or narrative inquiry elements to capture participants' subjective perspectives and lived experiences. Purposive sampling was utilized to select a diverse range of participants representing various demographic backgrounds, educational levels, and experiences with online assessment. Age, gender, academic discipline, year level, and online assessment experience were also considered when selecting the

participants to ensure a comprehensive representation of learners' experiences. A total of 10 participants were selected for the one-on-one semi-structured interviews for the final data gathering. The researchers gathered data in a span of 4 weeks. Quantitative data were gathered by administering survey questionnaires to the selected participants who experienced online assessment. Data such as age, gender, academic discipline, year level, and online assessment experience were collected. An interview protocol comprising open-ended questions that explore participants' perceptions, attitudes, challenges, and suggestions regarding online assessment practices was developed. Supplementary data collection methods such as participant observation, focus groups, or document analysis were considered for the triangulation of findings and to enrich the depth of understanding. One-on-one semi-structured interviews with selected participants were conducted to gather rich qualitative data about their experiences with online assessment. Necessary approval and informed consent were obtained from all participants before their involvement in the study, ensuring clarity regarding participation's purpose, procedures, and potential risks and benefits. Participants' confidentiality and anonymity were safeguarded by employing pseudonyms and securely storing and anonymizing data. Ethical guidelines and principles of research conduct were adhered to, including respect for participants' autonomy, beneficence, and justice.

We used thematic analysis to analyze the qualitative data from interviews and other sources. We also used frequency and percentages to describe the characteristics of the participants, such as their age, gender, academic field, year level, and experience with online assessments. In the qualitative part of the study, learners' interviews and audio records were transcribed and analyzed using the thematic method. The treatment process includes transcription, coding, and categorization through themes. The iterative coding, categorization, and interpretation process were applied to identify recurring themes, patterns, and variations in participants' narratives. Reflexive data interpretation was engaged, critically examining the findings in relation to existing literature, theoretical frameworks, and the broader socio-cultural context. Key insights and implications from the data analysis were synthesized to develop a coherent narrative that shed light on learners' experiences with online assessment.

This study is subject to several limitations. The generalizability of findings may be constrained by sample size and representativeness. Data collection methods, such as surveys and interviews, may introduce biases or limit the depth of information gathered. Additionally, participant factors like social desirability bias, recall bias and dropout rates can affect data accuracy. Technological limitations and variations in learning environments can influence learner experiences. The rapidly evolving nature of online assessment technology may limit the long-term applicability of the results.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the data collected, four key themes emerged: challenges faced by learners during the online assessment, advantages experienced, disadvantages encountered, and the overall perception of online assessments at the university. Each theme, along with its respective sub-themes, is discussed in detail in the following section.

3.1. Challenges that learners experienced during online assessment

3.1.1. Audio clarity

During the online assessment, all participants, particularly those living in remote areas, experienced difficulties with audio clarity. Students in online classes are concerned about the audio and visual quality of lecture videos, as this can negatively impact their understanding of the material. The production quality and the instructor's delivery of the content are essential for engaging students. Poor audio and visual quality will ultimately decrease attention and understanding among learners [4]. This is particularly true, especially when conducting the online assessment.

3.1.2. Short attention span

Every participant experienced having a short attention span. The majority of them were interrupted by their classmates, an introvert, unclear audio, unstable internet connections, distractions in their respective homes, and disturbance of applications such as Facebook. Students and professors observed several challenges during the transition to online learning [5]. Students noted that it was more difficult to concentrate during online classes [6]. Some students find the learning materials, such as 1-hour video lectures or timed activities with lengthy readings, to be too long and to negatively impact their attention span. Despite the opportunities that technology offers, it was found that students still need help to maintain their attention towards online learning activities [7]. Students with shorter attention spans and lower concentration struggle more during online assessments. Paying attention requires significant cognitive effort [7]–[9]. One of the biggest challenges for instructors is helping students stay focused throughout classes to maximize learning opportunities [10]. Some studies have shown that students may lose interest quickly and stop learning if they

struggle to follow the teacher's instructions [11]–[13]. Students also found it difficult to stay focused in online classes, citing boredom, isolation, lack of time for different subjects, and difficulty in self-organizing as significant barriers [5], [14].

3.1.3. Poor internet connection

Since the pandemic was unanticipated, the participants' top challenge throughout the online assessment was access to the internet. Out of ten participants, only one is close to a signal tower and has a reliable internet connection. On the other hand, most of them need help understanding the instructor's discussions and complying with assessments such as exams, quizzes, and activities, especially if they only have data connections during blackouts. Slimi [15] identified poor internet connections, lack of collaboration among students, and cultural restrictions as the most frustrating aspects of online learning. Another study emphasized the importance of improved internet connectivity for e-learning, especially in rural areas [16]. Additionally, differences in broadband internet quality between students living at home and on campus are likely a significant factor in this potential divide [17]. Because many schools serve both urban and rural areas, differences in internet connectivity can affect the effectiveness of online or blended learning models and limit the ability of certain students to fully engage with online content. As mentioned in the work of Tria [18], the Philippines has the slowest internet connectivity in Asia [19].

3.1.4. Lack of gadgets for online activities

Only two participants had laptops that their parents provided, but most had mobile phones. The challenge they encountered was the technology's total capacity for storing large files related to their assessments. Additionally, not all students have the necessary equipment or hardware (computers or cell phones), software, or even internet access [20]. The biggest obstacle to overcoming the challenges of assessment is the availability of technological devices. Access to learning tools or devices is crucial for online assessment. Despite living in an era of technological advancements, some people still lack access to necessary devices [21]. This divide may be caused by factors such as limited access to appropriate equipment, like a laptop or desktop computer, a suitable home learning environment, or the digital literacy skills needed for online learning [22]. Studies by Schneider and Council [17], Rasheed *et al.* [23], and Zydney *et al.* [24] also highlight these technological challenges, including access to high-speed broadband, which can affect student and teacher engagement in online education, especially with synchronous-based content.

3.1.5. Poor communication

Participants in online assessments report having trouble communicating because of an unstable internet connection. The discussions during online sessions could have been more interactive since the learners and the teachers are connected online, though they were isolated. This divisive situation ultimately resulted in the participants' hesitation to ask questions and clarifications about their online assessment. A study highlights that interactivity in online learning can improve learning quality and prevent misunderstandings [25]. Davis *et al.* [26] identified misinterpreted expectations, time management, and interpersonal communication as student barriers to online learning. Instructor barriers might involve identifying expectations, providing feedback, and interpersonal relations. Some professors talked the entire class without allowing feedback, emphasizing interactivity [10]. Interactive online classes can ensure student engagement during lectures and assessments [8]. While not required, professors may allow short breaks for students to understand the material better [27]. The flexibility to complete activities anytime and anywhere can lead to procrastination, with students submitting assignments close to deadlines or not at all [8].

3.1.6. Financial issues

Financial difficulties have affected all participants, especially given the demand for data. Additionally, the loss of their parents' jobs brought on by the pandemic became the reason for their financial instability. Sometimes, they would ask their neighbours' permission to connect to their wifi to comply with their online exams/activities. The global economic crisis and the resulting decline in employment, especially in marginal jobs, negatively affected students' financial situations [7], [28], [29]. In a study by Demuyakor [30], the high cost of participating in online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic was evident. Students spent a significant amount on internet data, and slow internet connectivity forced them to seek locations with better internet access.

3.1.7. Lack of information and communication technology literacy

All participants found it challenging to use the information and communication technology (ICT) because of the numerous existing applications available for online assessment. However, they can resolve this problem with friends, family, and other platforms like YouTube. Meanwhile, technology has already been widely employed in modern teaching and learning approaches. The use of instructional technology, like

lecture videos, online courses, and online assessments, has been shown to improve the knowledge and skills of both instructors and students. However, some students lack the necessary technological knowledge and skills to effectively use online assessment tools, and many need to become more familiar with the online assessment process. Alruwais *et al.* [31] indicated that it is necessary to provide the students with adequate training to be familiar with the technological tools used for online assessment. New teaching and learning methods are possible through the use of ICTs, which can help develop higher-order skills like solving complex real-world problems and improving understanding of the learning process [32]. Using ICTs in teaching and learning can provide more opportunities for teachers and students to work effectively in today's globalized digital world [33]. Whether digital technologies can create jobs depends on people's awareness of their benefits, their skills in using them, and their ability to apply them in real-world situations. Incorporating ICT into education is essential for enhancing student learning.

3.2. Advantages that learners experienced during the online assessment

3.2.1. Provide more opportunities

All participants recognized the advantages of online assessment. These include discovering new online platforms, learning more about a specific subject, improving ICT literacy, and allowing students to work while studying. An increasing number of higher education institutions (HEIs) worldwide are adopting online learning, making education more accessible to a diverse range of students, including those living in remote areas, those with disabilities, parents with children, and full-time working students [34].

3.2.2. Give enough time to complete assessment tasks

The majority of participants found that there was enough time to complete their assessments and absorb the lessons. Researching information about their subjects also helped learners deepen their knowledge about the discussed lesson. On the other hand, one participant stated that they felt uneasy while learning or studying online because of their surroundings. Zakrzewski and Bull [35] state that online assessment has three benefits. Students have the freedom to complete assignments at their own pace as long as they meet the deadline. They also have multiple chances to take assessments until they achieve the desired grade. Feedback is provided promptly to help students identify areas where they need to improve.

3.2.3. Improves motivation

Most participants lack motivation when doing assessments online, leading to boredom. They prefer conducting assessments physically. However, three participants said enhancing motivation is achievable because they are open to learning and adapting to the environment. Students' motivation in distance education is partly determined by the teaching approaches, course content, and other resources. Konecki [36] reported that students who participated in distance education were satisfied with it and found it to be at least as effective and more engaging than traditional classroom learning. The study showed that the course material was clear and understandable, students were actively engaged, and the technology used was appropriate for the learning goals. Most students reported an increase in motivation, although some preferred traditional classroom instruction. Almaleki *et al.* [37] found that distance education via an internet-based platform was linked to strong student performance, which was partly due to the exciting and enjoyable features of the platform.

3.2.4. Independent learner

Most participants testified they were independent during the online assessment due to isolation during the pandemic. However, regardless of being independent, two of the eight participants stated that the online environment is still collaborative in that they can still ask questions and discuss in their group chats. Wiatr and Barbiere [38] suggest that students can revisit their lessons by watching recordings made by the teacher and obtaining information from books or the internet to reinforce their knowledge. Both students and teachers agreed that online learning approaches had promoted a focus on students. Students had become independent learners, capable of learning at their own pace and time.

3.2.5. Improves understanding of the subjects

Half of the participants claimed that online assessment improves their understanding of the subjects, and they can still search for and inquire about data through different online platforms like Google and YouTube. On the contrary, half of them honestly stated that they are unsure if it improves understanding as information from the internet is not all accurate. The distance between teachers and students also became a barrier since they needed help contacting the teachers, especially offline. In particular, the engineering course needs improvement to understand its concept. It is hard to understand the subject because it needs hands-on application, so it is better to conduct it face-to-face. According to Gonzalez *et al*. [39], "over a year into the COVID-19 pandemic, online schooling has become a tiring and challenging way of learning for many Filipino students."

3.2.6. Improves creativity using information and communication technology resources

Since they could experiment with new apps and sharpen their skills and creativity when creating PowerPoint presentations and other online activities or assessments, most participants used ICT resources to develop their creativity. Through online assessments, they were also interested in utilizing new ICT tools to enhance and increase the quality of their outputs. However, one participant reported that using ICT resources did not increase his creativity because he quickly needs to remember the functions of programs and frequently relies on his sister and group members to complete the online assessments. Students' literacy level and ability to access online learning are also crucial to the effectiveness of online learning [40]. Additionally, students should be exposed to modern technologies to stay relevant in today's world. They should become familiar with different online tools to maintain their up-to-date knowledge. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the development of new teaching methods and online learning applications to help achieve learning goals [17]. Educational innovation should continue to ensure that this progress does not stop [41].

3.2.7. Advanced interaction with teachers and students

Because they can easily communicate with their classmates and teachers through Messenger and do not necessarily need to attend school to ask their teachers questions, half of the participants believe that online assessments promote interaction with professors and students. However, half of the participants said that there is no advanced interaction between teachers and students because of barriers like an unstable internet connection, a greater emphasis on digital learning, and the fact that students would still be turning off their cameras and not paying attention if the teacher discussed and provided information. According to Kirmizi [42], online interaction in learning occurs when students interact with course content, instructors, and peers. Engaging and interactive learning activities encourage students to interact with their teachers and classmates, and they increase students' involvement in the course material. Students learn more by explaining concepts themselves rather than simply receiving information. In these interactions, students are encouraged to ask questions about a topic to find answers for themselves.

3.3. Disadvantages that learners experienced during online assessment

3.3.1. Provide cheating opportunities for students

All of the participants concurred that students have the opportunity to cheat when taking assessments online. Students who took assessments online should have paid more attention to the discussion because they asked fellow learners for answers. They asserted that they could find it right away if they tended to access the exam form to look at other people's responses. In order to avoid plagiarism detection, they use Quillbot to search for answers online. The students also communicate with one another in group chats to ask questions and work together to take quizzes. There is also an instance where their section was known as hackers, as their classmate stole the test form from their teacher. Cheating has been an overwhelming issue for tutors when assessing students in online learning contexts [43]. The primary threats to online assessment environments were impersonation and plagiarism. In addition, assessment in online learning contexts has been discussed internationally, as online learning can be threatened by cheating, plagiarism, dishonesty, and impersonation [44]. According to Alsadoon [45], "since online assessments provide instructors with fewer control opportunities, it may be easier for students to cheat." Today's advanced technology has made it easier for students to cheat on online exams. The shift to online learning during the pandemic has significantly increased the rate of cheating in exams. The absence of a physical exam environment can make it difficult to prevent cheating. Students may cheat by accessing information from various sources during exams or forming communication networks with other students through online platforms [46]. Hylton *et al*. [47] observed that students often use the internet, their notes, and seek help from classmates or friends to complete online exams. In a virtual learning environment, it might be more challenging for teachers to control or stop students from cheating than in a traditional learning environment.

3.3.2. Assessment results unreliable

All participants agreed that online assessment outcomes are unreliable since they frequently lack preparation and rely solely on platform questions. The 1 participant claimed to have used 2 devices to complete the online test. The 1 is to view online tests, and the other is to look for answers. On the other hand, one student said that while looking for answers, he also tried to understand why the answer was the same. Many online platforms were available to support online learning. However, universities struggled to adapt their educational activities to an online environment and implement effective control measures for online assessments. Additionally, professors and students face various logistic, technical, financial, and social problems that must be addressed as soon as possible [48].

3.3.3. Makes learning less meaningful

The majority of participants believe that online assessments make learning less meaningful because they are made primarily for compliance, even though students do not really understand the discussions, and because the majority of the information is taught online, where students are unable to interact with their teachers and classmates during discussions. Additionally, because they opt to spend too much time on Facebook rather than completing online assessments, they find it challenging to concentrate throughout assessments. However, it benefits some learners because they can still learn at home. Despite remote learning, students still work very hard to comprehend the lessons, and 1 participant said that learning depended on the student's willingness to learn. Academically, although students can learn anything online, learning may be less than optimal, especially in courses requiring face-to-face contact and direct interactions [49]. A common finding of studies that analyze student assessments in developing economies is that learning losses have been highly unequal [50], affecting students from low-income families more severely due to more significant adverse shocks to family income, inferior internet access, and lower ability of parents to support learning. This has resulted in students returning to school with significant differences in their academic knowledge.

3.3.4. Becomes stressful for students with unstable internet connection

All students become stressed with an unstable internet connection, especially when having an assessment, particularly in a quiz application, because there is a tendency for the questions to proceed to the next item continually. In that case, they will be unable to answer the previous items, leading to low scores. On the other hand, inconsiderate teachers can make the students' lives stressful since they need help with internet connections to comply with their online assessments such as quizzes and exams. Casillano [51] found that only a small number of students have internet access, which limits their ability to use the e-learning platform. This aligns with the findings of Chung *et al.* [52], who identified internet connection as one of the main challenges in online learning. Siddiquah and Salim [53] and Bisht *et al.* [54] also found that unreliable internet signals can hinder students' learning. Wickramanayake and Jika [55] identified unreliable internet connections as one of the barriers that can make students' lives stressful.

3.3.5. Does not boost confidence

The study revealed that online assessments while facilitating educational continuity, may not always enhance learner confidence. Participants reported facing barriers during online assessments that hindered their confidence. These barriers included: i) difficulty studying alone: students expressed a preference for group study and missed the support of classmates; ii) audio disclarity: technical issues like poor audio quality discouraged them from interacting with classmates and teachers; and iii) public speaking concerns: one participant highlighted online assessments as exacerbating public speaking anxiety, leading to a perceived weakness in oral communication. This result contrasts the findings of Lin and Nguyen [56], who suggest that online assessments can boost confidence. Possible reasons for the discrepancy are: i) the current study may have focused on a population more susceptible to test anxiety or lacking experience with online learning and ii) the specific format of the online assessments used might not have been conducive to confidence-building. Overall, the findings suggest that online assessments can be a double-edged sword. While they can ensure educational continuity, additional support might be needed to mitigate their potential negative impact on student confidence.

3.3.6. Affected by distractions caused by domestic concerns at home or within family

Because the family assigns different household responsibilities, most participants consider domestic issues at home or inside the family to be one of the disadvantages of online assessment. They find it challenging to complete online assessments and participate in oral recitation. Additionally, there were times when the students were expected to look after their nephew or niece. One participant, nevertheless, claims that her parents can understand the situation while she is taking an online assessment. Unlike schools, homes are not designed for academic learning or to minimize distractions. Therefore, while noise can negatively affect learning and concentration in schools, its impact on home learning may be even more significant. This suggests that some students may find it more challenging to learn at home due to noise distractions. According to Parmentier [57], "the unpredictable and ever-changing noise often present in a home is most likely to cause distraction."

3.4. General impression of online assessment in the university

Most students stated that their impression of online assessments at the university needs improvement because students tend to cheat during online assessments. It should have authentication to ensure they answered the assessment without opening other tabs. Participants added that their teachers were negligent and inconsiderate and had high standards they wanted their students to attain. However, those

students who were slow learners needed help with their understanding. Additionally, participants stated that the teachers were busy with their administrative work, which may have caused them not to conduct classes.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research highlights the complex experiences of learners in online assessments. By examining the assessment process from the perspective of the learner's experiences, the study reveals critical insights into the challenges, motivations, and preferences of learners using digital platforms. The findings emphasize the importance of understanding learner perspectives to design effective online assessment strategies. Educators can better support learner success by recognizing diverse engagement methods and improving feedback mechanisms. Recommendations include implementing stronger authentication and monitoring measures to prevent cheating, providing professional development for teachers, and reducing administrative burdens. Support for slow learners through tutoring programs and personalized learning plans, enhancing teacher-student interaction, and offering flexible deadlines and empathy training are also crucial. Finally, improving the online learning infrastructure with robust technical support and accessible resources will further enhance the quality of online education.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

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C : **C**onceptualization
M : **M**ethodology
So : **So**ftware
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I : **I**nvestigation
R : **R**esources
D : **D**ata Curation
O : Writing - **O**riginal Draft
E : Writing - Review & **E**diting
Vi : **Vi**sualization
Su : **Su**pervision
P : **P**roject administration
Fu : **Fu**nding acquisition

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

There is no conflict of interest for this study.

INFORMED CONSENT

The authors obtained informed consent from all individuals included in this study.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

The University currently does not have an institutional ethics board, but it has a Research, Innovation, and Extension Office, which serves as an equivalent committee for research approval. Research

related to human use has complied with all the relevant national regulations, including the data privacy law of the Philippines and institutional policies in accordance with the tenets of the Helsinki Declaration and has been approved by the Office of Research, Innovation, and Extension (ORIE). The scholarly work for this research has undergone a rigorous review and evaluation by the experts from ORIE and has been approved by the University President through the recommendation of the Vice President for Research, Innovation, and Extension. The above mechanism for approval ultimately aligns with journal guidelines for ethical oversight.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data supporting this study's findings are available on request from the corresponding author, [RBA]. The data, which contain information that could compromise the privacy of research participants, are not publicly available due to certain restrictions from the data privacy law of the Philippines.

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